THE SOUTHERN WOMEN IN THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES

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Reminiscences of Mrs. A. J. Ellis

Read before the Caswell Nash Chapter
of the Daughters of the American Revolution

"I come before you," fully realizing that we have for this occasion a great subject. What the Southern Women did in the old war of the sixties is a subject for a genius much less for one who is not a genius. We believe we could come nearer telling what the Southern Women didn't do in those days than to tell what they did, but in, "falling below Demosthenes and Cicero," I feel that I am in the midst of kind and charitable friends who will not, "view me with a critic's eye," as you have lately seen with your present-day eyes what our women can and will do under similar circumstances.

You know, "the half can never be told." We decided not to take our limited time reading sketches taken from books, histories, biographies, etc., that all of us can read for ourselves but try to make the best of what we will call unwritten history. No one can hope to relate anything new this late in the day, so all we can do is to pass our traditions on to the generations as they come along. Everyone knows that the war fell heaviest on those whose homes were in the invaded regions, especially where this occurred early in the struggle, along the borders of Virginia, Tennessee and other sections in the war zone where homes were devastated and often entirely destroyed and the women and children were compelled to seek refuge anywhere--sometimes

hardly able to find standing room.

Should there be anyone present who has not read, "Southern Women in War Times," by Mr. Matthew Page Andrews we would recommend it as being one that will be found exceedingly interesting as well as instructive. Mr. Andrews has taken great pains in collecting a number of diaries, reminiscences, etc., written by the women themselves. Anyone who has never heard of that war, on reading this book could form a very good idea of the suffering and privations of these women and with what heroic fortitude they met them.

We will not stop to discuss at length what brought on the war. The Southern people said it was the protective tariff--unjust taxation, and after they had endured as much as any self-respecting, loyal Southerners could or would, peaceably seceded, which they had a perfect right to do. (See Constitution of the United States 1861). Abraham Lincoln saying he could not afford to lose the revenue of the South immediately declared war upon us, without consulting either Congress or the Cabinet, - and right away hurled a great horde of old savages down upon our Southern Country killing, burning and destroying everything, turning women and children out of their homes and burning them before their faces. For what? Said the Northern people, "To save this glorious Union." How could such loving, luring enchantment fail to bring about "Peace on earth and good will to men". Sometimes the negro question would"bob up," and claim attention, but no intelligent people, North or South were deceived by that. The first States to take action through their Legislatures against the African slave trade were Georgia, South Carolina next, and then Virginia. However, they went at us and we stood our ground. A virginia lady on being asked by President Lincoln, "What did you all rebel for?" replied, "Because we could

not help it." Through the influence of some high-up official who was an old friend of her family, she managed to gain audience with Mr. Lincoln hoping for his aid in having her innocent old father, who was a suffering prisoner at Fort Delaware, released. Lincoln with his usual craftiness deceived her into thinking he wished to help her, so he gave her a card to Secretary of War Stanton. "He knew his Stanton." When presented with the card, Stanton snatched it from her, tore it up and told her to "go to Hell." She replied, that she was going to Fort Delaware. After all efforts to settle the great question had failed and there was no longer any doubt that war had come, and our men everywhere were responding so nobly when called on to defend their beloved Southland, our women felt that they too were called. So they marched right up side by side with their fathers, husbands, brothers and friends to render wholeheartedly their part of the service.

Perhaps no family in the South was called upon to make greater sacrifices than that of our Great Leader Robert E. Lee. When the time came to make the final decision, his wife and daughters did not anymore hesitate to stand up to their old Mother State Virginia than did the husband, father and brothers. So it was with the women throughout the whole Southern country.

We do not think it would be fair to say the women of the South went to work. They were already at work. We doubt if there were any women on earth who were more industrious than the women of the Southern United States. They did all kinds of work. Almost everything in those days was done by hand. Most of the clothing worn by both white and colored, even before the war, was spun and woven at home, to say nothing of all the sewing done by hand. Most all the knitting was done at home on needles stitch by stitch. There were very few families, if any, in

the rural districts from the War of the Revolution down to the War Between the States who did not own a loom, wheel and cards. So when the war came, the southern women only took on more work, with almost no conveniences compared to the present day. There were no systematic organizations. Each woman had to be her own Florence Nightingale, Grace Darling or Molly Pitcher as the case might be. Yes, we had a Molly Pitcher right here in our own State. Disguised as a Confederate soldier, she, with her husband, joined the 26th North Carolina Regiment as recruits from Wilkes County sometime after the war began. She was supposed to be a younger brother of her husband. One company from my neighborhood known as the Holly Springs Company, was "Company D" of that same regiment. This soldier woman was a member of another company of this regiment. One of our neighbor boys, William "Q" Maynard of "Company D", told me that he knew her and her husband well, and on one occasion he was on guard with her all night. She served nearly a year and took regular soldier fare, battles and all, was in three big battles one of which was the famous battle of Fallin Water, " Somewhere in Virginia". Not one of the company or regiment suspected she was a woman until one day she donned her female attire and resigned.

We will remember the 26th was out Zeb Vance's old Regiment. At the begining of the conflict the women everywhere were busy getting their boys equipped. As a specimen of what they did for their neighborhood companies, we will take the first company raised and encamped at Holly Springs, N. C. We suppose the Government furnished uniforms for all enlisted men, but these were not considered fine enough for their boys. A large sum of money was raised. Several of the neighbors contributed as much as six hundred dollars and the finest military cloth was purchased. One of the most progressive and popular citizens of

Holly Springs was a trained tailor by occupation. He had to some extent outgrown the tailoring business financially, having a large store of general merchandise, a valuable terpentine plant and a farm near by, but he still kept open a small tailor shop and did enough work to "keep his hand in". It was well known that when he turned out a suit, it was "the last work", along that line. He cut and fitted all these suits and with the help of the women of the community soon had what was said to have been one of the finest dressed companies in the State. Almost every woman in those days could cut and make a suit of men's clothes. One at the present day can hardly imagine what elegant work the women could do by hand. They sewed, spun, wove and knitted and many did their garden and farm work. This company remained at Holly Springs for a while drilling and preparing for the front and during that time they were well attended to.

All the women and girls all over the country were busy helping in some way to win the war. Wherever there were sick or wounded soldiers they helped to nurse and take care of them in whatever capacity circumstances required. Besides all this war work, they had their own families to provide for. So many of the men were off in the army that they not only had their household duties but also the farms and shops to superintend. No one but an eye witness can ever know how skillfully our women managed. I wish I could pass before you a panorama of the beautiful and useful things they manufactured. The beautiful homespun dresses, hats, bonnets, shawls, scarfs, hoods, gloves, hose, etc. Almost everything was utilized in some way. Worn out silken garments were tinted up and mixed with lambs wool and cotton, finger picked from the seed, carded, spun and woven into such fine, beautiful dress goods that one would have supposed they came through the blockade from France.

Some of the most elegant hats and bonnets I have ever seen were made of corn shucks, palmetto, oatstraw and different kinds of grasses. These are just only a few hints of the work of the women of those days. It would require volumes to do anything like justice to their skill and diligence. They even wove snowdrop linen table cloths from flax they raised on the farms. Lots of the towels, blankets, flannel underwear, and jeans cloth for top suits for the soldiers were woven by the women at home. Did they appear gloomy, discouraged and overworked? Not at all. Everyone was cheerful and hopeful. They just vied with each other in showing to the world what they could do, and whenever any of the boys came home on leave of absence it was an inspiration to see the ladies all dressed up in their finery, home made giving great quilting parties as well as other kinds of entertainments. I do not think I have ever seen such gay times before or since. Then the good things put in boxes that were sent to "Camp" would make our mouths water even this long afterwards. Not only "goodies" to eat were boxed up and sent but boxes of clothing--everything that a soldier needed was sent on.

The only woman of whom we have any record that was granted a commission with the full rank of captain in the Confederate army was Miss Sallie Tompkins of Richmond, Virginia. Soon after the first Battle of Manassas on July 21, 1861, hospital accommodations were found to be so inadequate in Richmond that private citizens were called upon to help take care of the sick and wounded. Miss Sallie Tompkins, a very wealthy young lady, as fortunes were reckoned in those days, decided to organize and equip a hospital of her own and at her own expense. So she procured the most spacious mansion available which was owned by a Dr. Robertson and was soon ready for occupation. It was known throughout the war as the Robertson Hospital. Soon after this, the authorities of Richmond

decided it would be best for all that the private hospitals be under the management of the Government as there might be times when private citizens would fail to procure the things necessary to such an institution, but Miss Sallie was very much opposed to yielding up hers. She had won the gratitude of so many people and felt so sure that her hospital would prove equal to whatever might be required of it, that the authorities compromised by letting her have her own way. So she was granted the commission of captain in the Confederate Army and was known as Captain Sallie Tompkins throughout the war. Captain Sally ran this institution successfully from July 1861 to the middle of June 1865. During that time nearly fourteen hundred people were cared for by this noble woman. This account of Captain Sallie's Hospital is to be found in Matthew Page Andrew's Book on, "Southern Women in War Times", but as I learned it from a niece of Miss Tompkin's, Mrs. Hugh Morson of this City, several years before Mr. Andrews' book was published, I do not feel that I am plagiarising. Miss Tompkins died a few years ago at the Home for Confederate Woman at Richmond, Virginia.

Many of our fine war time poems and songs were written by our Southern Women. The name of the author of the beautiful and popular song, "The Homespun Dress", for years seemed to evade the public. John Uri Loyd, author of the popular novel, "Stringtown on the Pike", wished to incorporate this song in his book, but hesitated because he did not know the name of the author. Finally, from an advertisement, he learned that it was Miss Carrie Bell Sinclair of Milledgeville, Georgia. She was the daughter of the Methodist minister, and a grand niece of Robert Fulton, the inventor of the steamboat. Splendid poems and songs were contributed by women of our own State. Mrs. Mary Bayard Clark, Mrs. Emma J. Cannon, Mrs. A. V. Pendleton and others.

I am sure every one present is familiar with the story of the capture and imprisonment of General "Jack" Morgan, the great Confederate Calvary raider, and how he made his escape by tunnelling himself out of a dungeon of the Ohio State Prison at Columbus on the Ohio River and making a successful escape. That story was accepted or seemed to be, by everybody North and South. A few years ago that old prison was torn down but there was no sign whatever of that tunnel. On investigation, it was learned that the women of Kentucky had raised $20,000.00 in gold and bribed the guards in helping the General to escape.

It seemed to fall to the lot of Miss Emma Sanson of Alabama to be the only Southern woman to be honored by a monument all by herself. She was the sixteen year old girl who showed General N. B. Forrest the Ford. Sometime during the war, Colonel Streight of the Federal army, set out with a force of two thousand men to make a raid down through Tennessee, Alabama and on into Georgia to destroy the city of Rome. He started out in high glee and for a few days seemed very much encouraged with the progress he was making, but about this time came the news that General Forrest was in pursuit, so he became very much disturbed, for he found that he had rough times ahead as well as General Forrest in the rear. The Country through which he was trying to pass was rocky and mountainous. It set in for a long rainy spell. What few roads or rather trails he could find were muddy and almost impossible to travel. He was having a dreadful time getting his army along. As General Forrest had only eight hundred men he could not attack Colonel Streight in the open. All he could do was to strike in now and then to keep the Colonel harassed and worried, for Colonel Streight had no idea of the strength or rather the weakness of the General's command. However, they kept on this way until Colonel Streight reached Black Creek near the

town of Gedsden, Alabama. Out on an elevation near this creek was a farm house, the home of a widow and her two daughters, the younger being sixteen years old. The only son was a soldier in the Confederate Army. Colonel Streight on his way to cross Black Creek near there stopped to have a few words with them, but had to hurry on for General Forrest and his men were close behind. Colonel Streight managed to get his men over across the bridge and then set it on fire. Very soon more calvarymen dashed up to this house and the leader said, "Ladies, I am General Forrest, have you seen any Yankees?" "Yes," said the mother, "Lots of them have just crossed and you see by the smoke they are burning the bridge." The creek at this place being very deep, it was impossible to ford it. General Forrest then asked the ladies if they knew of any ford where they could cross right away. "Yes", said the younger girl, "There is a ford out in our field. I have seen cattle cross the creek there. If someone will saddle a horse, I will show you." "We haven't time to saddle a horse," said the General. "Get up behind me, I will bring you back all right." So she mounted behind General Forrest and soon showed him the ford. Her mother being very much alarmed called, "You, Emma, where are you going?" "I am going to show General Forrest the Ford." The General brought her back, thanked her, and soon had his men all over and in full chase after Colonel Streight. It was not long before General Forrest surrounded and captured Colonel Streight and his entire force having chased him one hundred and fifty miles. This patriotic little girl who helped General Forrest and his men to save Rome, Georgia, was highly honored by the grateful people in many ways, but the climax of their expression was in the beautiful monument to her memory which stands on the east end of Broad Street, Gadsden, Alabama and bears the following inscription:

"In memory of the Gadsden Alabama girl heroine, Emma Sanson, who, when the bridge across Black Creek had been burned by the enemy, mounted behind General Forrest and showed him a ford where his command might cross the creek. He pursued and captured that enemy and saved the city of Rome, Georgia. A grateful people took the girl into their love and admiration. So will this marble outlast the love and pride her deed inspired."

The monument was erected by the Gadsden Chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy. The story of this Alabama girl heroine is found in Dr. Wyeth's great biography of General Forrest, but as I had a first cousin who followed General Forrest throughout the war and was with him when he crossed Black Creek and surrounded and captured Colonel Streight, I feel that I have some right to help pass it on.

The story of the Southern Women in the War of the Sixties without mention being made of the old colored "Mammy" would be leaving out an "Item" that cannot well be spared. What would we have done but for the fidelity of these dear loyal old creatures? Whatever her duties, whether in the cornfield, in the cotton patch, in the kitchen, at the wash tub, at the spinning wheel, in the loom, "nussin de chilluns, or waiting in de house" mammy bore us along on "snowy wings". Visions of freedom "cut no ice" with her. In fact, Mammy was about the only free woman in the whole Southern country, for she was care free while "mistis" had to take thought for the morrow. Polk Miller in one of his delightful lectures on the Old Plantation Darkey, said that early in the war when his neighborhood company reached the station to take the train for the front, and loved ones and friends who had assembled with them to see them off, had about all taken leave, here came his old colored mammy holding out her old toil-worn hand and with tears streaming down her dusky cheeks, stammered, "Good-bye, Mars Polk, ef dem Yankees git atter you, you jest run lak anything." Our young men might not in this

instance have considered that form of "discretion the better part of valor", but they understood and appreciated mammy who had so often crooned them to sleep to:

"O come, angel band
Come and around me stand
And bear me away on your snowy wings
To my immortal home."

The old "Stars and Bars " furled aside, wreathed in immortal glory will live forever in the hearts of the Southern people. The grand old Stars and Bars! The inspiration of that sterling patriot our own Major Orrin Randolph Smith of Louisburg, North Carolina! Yet we do not believe there ever was a man, woman or child in the whole Southland who ever once ceased to love the old flag of our ancestors, the Stars and Stripes of Betsy Ross. The use that was made of that flag was what we resented. The Stars and Stripes that we love and honor is the one to which that grand patriot, Southern Statesman and Orator, Ben H. Hill of Georgia paid the following tribute:

"The South, My Countrymen, never made war upon the Union. We did not leave the Union because we were dissatisfied with it; we did not leave it to make war upon it. We left the Union because a sectional party had seized it and we hoped thereby to avoid a conflict. Patriots North! Patriots South! Patriots everywhere! Let us hallow this year of jubilee by burying all our sectional animosities. Let us close our eyes to the men and the parties that teach us to hate each other. Raise high that flag of our fathers! Let Southern breezes kiss it! Let Southern skies reflect it! Southern patriots will love it! Southern sons will defend it and Southern heroes will die for it! And as the folds unfurled beneath the heavens, let our voices unite and swell the loud invocation! Flag of our Union, Wave on! Wave Ever! but wave over

freemen not over provinces! and now let the voices of the patriots from the North and from the West join the voices from the South and send to heaven one universal according chorus. Wave on flag of our fathers! Wave on forever! but wave over a Union of equals not over a despotism of lords and vassals! Wave over a land of law and liberty and peace and not over anarchy, oppression and strife."

We will close with the words in which our beloved President of the Southern Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, dedicated his great work, "The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy." "To the women of the Confederacy, whose lives ministered to our wounded soldiers, comforted the last hours of those who died far away from the objects of their tenderest love, whose domestic labors contributed much to supply the wants of our defenders in the field, whose zealous faith in our cause shone as a guiding star, undimmed by the darkest clouds of war, whose fortitude sustained them through all the privations to which they were subjected; whose floral tributes annually express their enduring love and reverence for our sacred dead and whose patriotism will teach their children to emulate the deeds of our revolutionary sires, these pages are dedicated by their countryman, Jefferson Davis."

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